



מסורה- חכמה- קהילה

*Sacred Tradition- Wisdom- Community*

*A Vision of the Future:*

*Building on our Tradition, Enhancing Academic Excellence, Engaging the Community*

*Adopted Sivan, 5770.....May, 2010*

## 1) Introduction

Torah Academy has served the entire Orthodox Jewish Community of Philadelphia since 1964. It provides strong programs in both Judaic and General Studies. Enrollment has fluctuated. Two years ago it was at a low of 250 children (Grades Nursery through 8). It now has 286 students, its highest total since 2003-4. We believe this trend can continue due to perceptions of improvement and solid recruiting in core markets.

Torah Academy's mission includes a commitment that, "With a curriculum rooted in Torah and General Studies characterized by academic excellence and providing skill proficiency in all areas, TA provides a dynamic Jewish education that fosters intellectual as well as spiritual understanding and love of Torah through a commitment to its mitzvot and values..."

Core values that are part of Torah Academy's mission include:

- 1) To provide the foundation for its students to mature as Torah-observant Jews and role models who are contributing members in Jewish and general society.
- 2) To teach the commandment of *Ahavat Yisrael*--love of Israel and the Jewish people--as embracing the Land and State of Israel, and fellow Jews.
- 3) To view each child as an individual and provides a stimulating education for students with different levels of academic ability and learning styles.
- 4) To partner with parents to nurture each student to develop as an entire person.
- 5) To prepare its students with the skills to pursue their Judaic and General Studies at the next level of learning and throughout life.
- 6) To make every reasonable effort to provide tuition assistance to those families who demonstrate financial hardship.

The school's target population includes students:

- Who can succeed in our program.
- Whose parents desire an education that is strong in both Orthodox Judaic/Hebrew Studies and General Studies for their children.
- Whose families are comfortable with the mission of the school.

**Our strategic vision is that over the next five years Torah Academy will build on its rich tradition and recent improvements to achieve the reality and perception of providing academic excellence in both Judaic and General Studies in a child-centered environment to the diverse student body in its target market.**

When a Torah Academy student receives his or her diploma they will:

- ❖ Be excited by their *Yahadut* and have a great love for Hashem, His Torah, His People and His Land.
- ❖ Be moral young adults who make a *Kiddush Hashem* (Sanctification of G-d's Name) by their positive interactions with others.
- ❖ Be confident young adults who treat others with respect and dignity.

- ❖ Have a high degree of skills and content knowledge and a desire to go further in their studies.
- ❖ Be prepared to do well in whatever Orthodox high school they and their parents select.
- ❖ Be well prepared for higher education as well for productive, meaningful lives in whatever employment suits their desires and abilities.
- ❖ Have developed critical thinking skills that allow them to make reasoned choices in a complex world based on their deep understanding of both Torah and General Studies.

Our parents will be well aware of their children’s accomplishments throughout school, and thus have a high degree of satisfaction with and confidence in the school. Our community will regard Torah Academy as the “first choice school” for its children and will be highly supportive of it. In short, Torah Academy will be correctly viewed as the child-centered jewel of the community.

This strategic plan, though written primarily by its *Menahel* (principal) Rabbi Shmuel Jablon, was fully developed with guidance of a committee of lay and professional leaders. Lay leaders included Amir Goldman (President), Rabbi Josh Weinberger (Vice President), Gittel Hilibrand (Vice President, Lower School), Rabbi Yehuda Seif (Chair, Education Committee). Professional leaders included Rabbi Naftoli Eisemann (*Sgan Menahel*-Assistant Principal, Judaic Studies), Dr. Joyce Kail (Assistant Principal), Kara Feldman (Early Childhood Director), Irv Gellman (Director of Student Services), Debbie Romanoski (Business Manager) and Rabbi Ari Silver (Assistant to the *Menahel*). Marc Blattner (Chief Resource Development and Strategy Officer of the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia) and David Magerman (President, Kohelet Foundation) also provided critical feedback. We also benefited from the guidance of Dr. Tom Ference, Columbia University and the Institute for Day School Management and of Rabbi Elimelech Gottlieb, Director of the Institute for Day School Management and former principal of a number of major Jewish Day Schools.

Much of this plan has been based on feedback from parents and faculty that we received from our 2009 Partnership in Excellence for Jewish Education Parent Survey.

This plan will be reviewed on an annual basis to continually evaluate performance-based on the milestone and evaluation criteria set- modify strategy and finances as needed, and to continue to look five years ahead. Please note that though this is a well thought out plan, it represents our reasonable goals, and is neither a contract nor a promise.

**Note:** This is a digest version of the strategic plan. The full plan is available to members of the school community upon request from the *Menahel* or President of the Board.

## 2) **IMPLEMENTING OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE**

In order to attain our vision, we plan to implement an aggressive plan and evaluation program.

- a) *We will maintain Torah Academy’s traditional focus on both love of Torah and middot tovot (positive character traits). We will also maintain our current level of excellence by*

*continuing the funding, structure and support needed to support the following core improvements that have taken place over the last two years. This includes:*

**1) Continuing our emphasis on meeting the needs of all students within our defined target market.**

- a full time a full time Special Education specialist
- a full time Gifted and Talented Education Specialist
- at least a 40% time school counselor
- grade level, cross disciplinary team meetings that insure teachers are working together to meet children's needs
- having meeting the needs of all students and differentiated instructed as part of teacher evaluations
- professional development that supports increased skills in this area

**2) Continuing our emphasis over the last two years on excellent and professional communication with parents. These include:**

- teachers emailing parents and using [www.homeworknow.com](http://www.homeworknow.com) (or similar platform)
- weekly eNewsletters for parents
- continually updating the school's web site, [www.torahacademyonline.org](http://www.torahacademyonline.org), to include lots of useful information for parents.
- updated Family Handbooks, School Calendar, Curriculum Guides and Class Schedules being on the school's website.
- issuing a news magazine on at least an annual basis
- having timely and professional communications with parents included as part of teacher evaluations

**3) Continuing the enhancements of the last two years in the area of co curricular and extra curricular programs that enhance student learning. These include:**

- Physical education being required twice weekly in all classes, pre-nursery through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Numerous connections being established between our school and Israel (both peer to peer learning, connections with Tzahal units, chesed opportunities).
- Enhanced extra curricular opportunities during and after school that allow for families to choose many options (often from outside vendors) in extra study, fine arts and physical education..
- Increased use of Ivrit within the school environment.

**4) Continuing the enhancements of the last two years in area of professionalizing the faculty and administration. These include:**

- Use of a formal evaluation structure for all faculty.
- Requiring all faculty to have either a degree or an established track record of professional excellence and for all relevant state licensing requirements to be in place.

- Having an administrative structure that includes two assistant principals and an Early Childhood Director that allows for proper delegation to highly qualified professionals.
- Enhancing professional development for teachers in all subjects for all teachers working with children from nursery through grade eight.

**5) Continuing to raise the involvement and prestige of Torah Academy in the community through:**

- Maintaining close and cooperative relationships with the Jewish Federation and Kohelet Foundation, both of whom provide substantial financial support.
- Maintaining close and cooperative relationships with our local Orthodox synagogues from whom we receive students. This includes maintaining the Menahel's Council, where the local pulpit rabbis advise and consult with the *Menahel* on a regular basis.
- Maintaining close and cooperative relationships with Torah Umesorah, the Yeshiva University Institute for University-School Partnerships, the Jewish Agency and the Amiel Institute (who trains *shlichim* teachers from Israel), all of whom provide programmatic and staff support.
- Maintaining and continually updating the school's web site to include helpful information for potential families and supporters in the community.

**6) Continuing to formalize our curriculum through:**

- Continually reviewing the formal, written curricula in all academic disciplines and maintaining these on our school's web site.
- Publishing a developmentally appropriate curriculum for our Early Childhood Program.
- Insuring that all of the books, materials and activities noted within the formal curricula are properly budgeted for and available for use.
- Continuing to review the report card system to make sure we are properly reporting student progress to parents. Report card samples will continue to be available on our school's web site so that families and students know on what they are assessed.
- Continuing to include use of Ivrit within Judaic Studies classes.
- Including making appropriate progress in the curriculum as part of faculty evaluations.

**7) Continue to increase our connections to Israel through:**

- Having faculty members who are themselves residents of Israel.
- Having opportunities in the formal and cocurricular programs for students to make connections with Israelis (including peers).
- Having "chesed" opportunities that relate to Israel.
- Continuing to integrate studies of Israel into the curriculum (e.g. Tanakh, Ivrit, Jewish History).

**8) Continue to increase the social-emotional awareness in the school to maintain and further create a warm and loving environment where the children can blossom to their full potential through:**

- Continuing our subcommittee of the education committee to make recommendations to administration for social emotional needs of students
- Having on staff a 40% school counselor who works with individual students and classes and writes in newsletter to update parents of school activities in this arena
- Increasing extra curricular activities
- Participating in the BRAVE Seeds elementary school bullying and training program run by Yeshiva University
- Continuing In-services for teacher training on identifying and handling social-emotional issues.
- Working with parents to provide extra supervision at lunch and recess.

**b) Further increase academic excellence by:**

**1) Continuing to improve our Judaic Studies, Ivrit, Tefillah, Math and Technology Programs.**

Over a five year period, we will continue to improve our Judaic Studies, Ivrit, Tefillah, Math, and Technology programs. These programs were targeted for improvement after receiving the report of our 2009 Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education Parent Survey.

**Action Items Include:**

➤ *Judaic and Ivrit Studies:*

*Overall goals:*

- 1) To further develop the curriculum to fully articulate core content and skills (including both textual and higher order thinking skills) in each grade level, in which successive grades build upon learned material and skills, and which integrates the Judaic disciplines of *Tanach*, *Torah Shebaal Peh*, *Halakha*, and Hebrew Language.
- 2) To continue to develop assessments that show the extent to which progress is being made, both with individual students and the school as whole, in these content areas.
- 3) To enhance our tefilla program.

*Specifics include:*

- ❖ Revise the tefilla curriculum in the Elementary School (Grades 1-5) to allow for more time to be spent explaining prayers.
- ❖ Start the Middle School day at 8:15 to allow for daily minyan.
- ❖ Enhance Faculty training.
- ❖ Updating the Ivrit curriculum.

- ❖ Increase achievement in both Judaic and Ivrit studies through working towards a standard where all mainstream students can understand the *peshat* (basic meaning) of a story, classroom instructions and written tests in Ivrit.
  - ❖ Fundraise for, and implement, new programs to support those in needs of further assistance in Judaic and Ivrit Studies because of lack of prior day school background (either children or parents).
  - ❖ Continuing to review and develop curricular materials to make sure that we are using the best possible materials to enhance achievement of our curricular goals.
- *Math:*
- ❖ Begin math extracurricular enrichment activities that will parallel those already being offered in both Judaic Studies and reading
  - ❖ By the second year of this plan, further edit and develop the math curriculum to reflect the updated curriculum selected for the school. Scott-Foresman Addison Wesley math is being taught school wide, beginning with the 2009-10 school year.
  - ❖ Based on research as well as budgetary realities, determine whether Middle School math will be tracked at Torah Academy. If so, this should be built in to the school's budget. If not, specific teacher training should be provided to faculty members as to how to differentiate math in mixed ability classrooms.
- *Technology:*
- ❖ Maintain at least the new hardware/software purchased over the last two years (24 desk tops, 24 lap tops and 8 notebook computers)
  - ❖ Begin by the 2012-13 school year our new educational technology program. This includes having a specialist into the school who will work with teachers and students to better use technology in the classroom in order to enhance learning. The school will have the new hardware/software needed to be prepared for the expanded technology program.

## 2) Developing a Formal System of Assessment of Academic Achievement

### **Action Items Include:**

- ❖ Select curricular based “anchor assessments” in both Judaic and General Studies.
- ❖ Continue to give the CTP IV standardized tests (from the Education Records Bureau).
- ❖ Provide a specialized test taking course from the Princeton Review to Middle School Students.
- ❖ Create and pilot needed Judaic and Ivrit Studies assessment tools to match the Torah Academy curriculum. These assessments will measure the achievement of both individuals and the class and school as a whole.

### **3) Increasing funds for professional development.**

#### **Action Items Include:**

- ❖ Maintain a significant budget for faculty to engage in approved professional development activities outside of school in addition to the professional development being provided by school faculty. Though this will be targeted in areas related to differentiated instruction (to continue progress made in meeting the needs of all student), Hebrew language and educational technology, it will also allow for programming tailored to the individual needs and goals of specific faculty members.

**c) Full accreditation from the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools will be achieved by the conclusion of the 2011-2012 school year and maintained thereafter.**

This is an important goal as the accreditation process is designed to foster school improvement. In addition, as other schools in our area have this accreditation, it is necessary to achieve this to be competitive in certain segments of our target population.

**d) Develop a “feedback” loop with receiving high schools, and Torah Academy alumni/parents in those schools, to monitor perceptions of graduate preparedness and success.**

#### **Action Items Include:**

- ❖ Consult with the principals of the high schools and Yeshivot that almost all of our graduates attend. Gain their general impressions and concerns regarding preparedness of Torah Academy graduates.
- ❖ Develop a formal system for surveying their perceptions of graduate preparation as well as their actual achievement in their school. Edit the survey with the receiving principals’ input.
- ❖ Develop a survey mechanism for recent alumni and their parents to provide feedback as to their preparedness for their high schools and to offer suggestions as to what else could have helped them.
- ❖ Begin implementing the formal surveys.
- ❖ Review data annually and, when necessary, make adjustments to the Torah Academy curriculum.
- ❖ Meet twice yearly with the receiving principals and, when necessary, review data and report changes.

**e) Further enhancing our programs that promote social-emotional growth.**

#### **Action Items Include:**

- ❖ Consider adding additional counseling staff time.
- ❖ Formalize an anti-bullying program school wide.
- ❖ Continue faculty training in social-emotional areas.
- ❖ Create speaker programs to advise parents about how best to help their children and work with the school to increase the social emotional skills of the children and decrease bullying.

- f) We will develop new ways of engaging our community through marketing our school both within and outside of the parent body.**

**Action Items Include:**

- ❖ Fundraise for further assistance in recruiting and marketing.
- ❖ Begin formulating a new recruitment and marketing plan. This will be intended to stimulate new enrollment as well as financial support, in addition to encouraging parent satisfaction and retention.
- ❖ Begin active recruiting in other Jewish communities, including at graduate schools such as Yeshiva University, Columbia and New York University) for families with children to make their home in Philadelphia and send their children to Torah Academy.

- g) A capital repairs/enhancement fund will be established and needed repairs/improvements made.**

***Evaluation***

One way in which we will measure performance is by our ability to put into place each year the programs, curricula, surveys, staff and funds noted in the plan above. This will be annually assessed. We will also annually review whether the plan needs to be modified. We will also annually consider where we want to be in five years. This will allow us to always be thinking five years into the future.

As part of our evaluation process we will also be examining additional performance measures on an annual basis.

We are confident that, with G-d's help and much work, we will achieve our vision that Torah Academy will achieve the reality and perception of providing academic excellence in both Judaic and General Studies in a child-centered environment to the diverse student body in its target market. We have rich tradition upon which to build and a glorious future in sight.